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# Roman noir et drapeau noir: Didier Daeninckx and the libertarian legacy

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## **Roman noir et drapeau noir: Didier Daeninckx and the libertarian legacy**

Martin Hurcombe

University of Bristol, French, Bristol, UK

### **ABSTRACT**

The crime novelist Didier Daeninckx originally established himself as an author of historical crime fiction. His 1984 novel, *Meurtres pour mémoire*, in particular challenged occluded and intertwined memories of the Occupation and the Algerian War of Independence. Since then, and through his subsequent writings and political activities, Daeninckx has been recognised as giving voice to a range of marginalised communities and memories. Much academic study has therefore concentrated on the recovery of the past in Daeninckx's fiction, approaching his work from the perspective of cultural history and memory studies, considering it a form of memory activism. This article offers a new perspective on Daeninckx's political engagement. It will examine Daeninckx's three contributions to Éditions Baleine's collaboratively authored detective series *Le Poulpe: Nazis dans le métro* (1996), *Éthique en toc* (2000) and *La Route du Rom* (2003). It will argue that they are informed by a memory of France's broad libertarian tradition which constitutes a hidden referent essential to understanding the formulation of the ethico-political counter-communities to which many of his characters (and his ideal, implied reader) belong. More particularly, it will argue that these communities form the basis of a new model of political engagement beyond party, state and class, suggesting not only the persistence but also the adaptability of libertarian thinking in Daeninckx's work and the French *roman noir*.

### **RÉSUMÉ**

Dans ses débuts, Didier Daeninckx, auteur de romans policiers, se fit connaître surtout en tant qu'auteur de romans policiers à thèmes historiques. Son roman *Meurtres pour mémoire* (1984) exposa des souvenirs enterrés et entremêlés de l'Occupation et de la guerre d'indépendance en Algérie. Depuis, grâce à ses écrits plus récents et ses activités politiques, il est devenu porte-parole de diverses communautés en marge de la société française et de leurs souvenirs. La critique s'est donc surtout penchée sur la façon dont Daeninckx rétablit le passé dans ses œuvres, les abordant à travers l'optique de l'histoire culturelle ou celle de l'étude de la mémoire, et y discernant une sorte de militantisme du souvenir. Cet article offre de nouvelles perspectives sur l'engagement politique de Daeninckx. Il examinera ses trois contributions à la série de romans à multiples auteurs publiée

chez les Éditions Baleine, *Le Poulpe : Nazis dans le métro* (1996), *Éthique en toc* (2000) et *La Route du Rom* (2003). Il examinera en quoi ces trois romans sont façonnés par la mémoire de la grande tradition libertaire en France qui constitue un référent caché ; ce dernier étant essentiel pour comprendre l'élaboration chez Daeninckx de contre-communautés éthico-politiques auxquelles appartiennent nombreux de ses personnages (et son lecteur idéal présumé). Surtout, cet article soutiendra que ces communautés offrent les bases de nouveaux exemples d'engagements politiques qui fonctionnent en dehors du parti, de l'état et de la classe sociale et qui évoquent non seulement la persistance mais également l'adaptabilité de la pensée libertaire chez Daeninckx et le roman noir en France.

## Introduction

Crime fiction would seem an unlikely place in which to seek the legacies, let alone the triumph, of libertarianism. As many scholars of the genre and its variants have noted, its narrative motor is the pursuit and restoration of order. It is, Marc Lits argues, a genre born of the positivist spirit, an embodiment of the nineteenth century's faith in science and progress, and characterised at this time by 'des enquêtes menées et narrées sous le signe de la raison pure' (1993, 35). Nineteenth and early twentieth-century crime fiction may toy with the reader's fear of the failure of reason and science, but ultimately reassures through the triumph of truth and of the bourgeois order (36). Typologies of later, more problematic crime fiction, such as those offered by Lits, Dubois (1992) and Todorov (1971, 55–65), point to variations on this fundamental narrative impulse produced by a 'logique de la différence' (Dubois 1992, 53) which has given us the thriller, the *roman noir* (influenced by the American *noir* of the 1930s and 1940s), the *roman à suspense* and the *néo-polar* (a nihilistic twist on the *noir* born in the wake of May 1968). Nevertheless, the crime novel remains 'a force against entropy. Its impulse is to reassemble the component parts, to restore order to a dysfunctional society, to achieve narrative closure' (Platten 2011, 14) even when closure and justice are frustrated, as is so often the case in the world of the *noir* and *néo-polar*.

For Susanna Lee, however, this frustration and the triumph of 'social disorder rather than narrative or judicial resolution' (2005, 177), particularly in the *noir* of the 1970s and 1980s, reflects an anarchic quality that finds an echo in punk aesthetics; both share

the same aesthetic terrain [characterised by] loud and cacophonous sounds, a celebration of the ugly and the grotesque ... The same thematic terrain: the underworld, the seedy, ... the morally unexemplary, outcasts, violence, drugs, crime, alienation. A similar formal construction: explosive verbal bursts or scenes of violence alternated with social and political criticism. (Lee 2005, 180)

There is in Lee's appraisal of the *noir's* anarchist aesthetic, however, an association of anarchism and libertarianism with nihilism, one also to be found in punk's appropriation of anarchist symbols. Yet, as George Woodcock argues, the association of anarchism with nihilism overlooks the former's underlying and guiding principle: 'anarchism is a doctrine which poses a criticism of existing society, a view of the desirable future society; and a means of passing from one to the other' (1986, 11).<sup>1</sup> While the fiction examined by Lee offers a searing critique of capitalist France, it is apparently devoid of the transformative, utopian dynamic Woodcock traces throughout the movement's history.

Nor does the study of Daeninckx and of his work appear to offer an immediate appreciation of the persistence of anarchism. Daeninckx's early novels were often concerned with the unmasking of historical crimes; his most successful novel of the 1980s, *Meurtres pour mémoire* ([1984] 2011a), fictionalised aspects of the real-life collaboration of the former Vichy civil servant, post-war Parisian police chief and one-time minister of the Republic, Maurice Papon, exposing a series of occluded memories pertaining to the Occupation, French connivance in the deportation of Jews and the state-sanctioned murder of French Algerians in the heart of Paris in October 1961. His subsequent fiction, public stances and political activities have helped to give voice to a range of marginalised communities and memories in France, including the Kanak people of New Caledonia and France's Romani population. Crime fiction, with its emphasis on the reconstruction of events that precede, but have shaped, the moment in which the inquiry is narrated (Todorov 1971), allows Daeninckx to recuperate a series of concealed memories, raising them to national consciousness, creating a counter-memory that prevents the reification of a monolithic, state-sanctioned national past (Rubino 2009, 22). Although his novels often conclude with the revelation of truth, and of the lengths to which power has gone in order to conceal its own ties to an oppressive past, there remains a degree of pessimism as to the extent to which such revelations will alter the status quo; the past resurfaces, but order is all too quickly restored.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, Daeninckx is associated with the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), with which he enjoys 'a complicated relationship' (Reid 2010, 45). His maternal grandfather was the first communist mayor of the Paris suburb of Stains, he grew up in its communist counter-community before leaving the PCF in 1982, but remains 'a fellow traveller, close to reformist currents in the party' (46). This complicated relationship is sometimes played out in his fiction; for example, in his novels rooted in the memory of the Second World War, Daeninckx's Resistance heroes tend to be communists. For Josiane Peltier, Daeninckx's novels are informed by a Marxist undercurrent to the extent that 'the oppressed are repositioned as the central agents, even if they are the physical victims, of a particular historic moment' (cited in Gorrara 2003, 82). Yet, the same novels are peppered with references to the totalitarian excesses of Stalinism and to the periodic complicity of French communism with fascism and anti-Semitism; notably during the Nazi–Soviet Pact of 1939–1941 and following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, depictions of anarchism in Daeninckx's work are ambiguous and sometimes even deeply unflattering. In *Le Der des ders* ([1984] 2002), for example, a novel which details the French military's part in suppressing a revolt amongst Russian soldiers stationed in France in 1917, René Griffon, the novel's detective, is led to investigate an anarchist gang operating in post-war Paris. Employing the clichéd excesses of anarchist illegalism and propaganda by deed, the gang is motivated by a desire to avenge one of its members murdered by the officer in charge of the same massacre. When their evidence falls into Griffon's hands, the gang blow him and his girlfriend up in a meaningless act of violence that destroys all their evidence. There is in this, as in much of Daeninckx's critique of the revolutionary left, a dislike of the assuredness and lack of humanity that accompany a dogmatic form of political commitment or *embrigadement*: the unquestioning surrender of one's own moral compass to the dictates of ideology and the sometimes ruthless pursuit of ends over means (Adereth 1967, 28). Indeed, the broad spectrum of the French revolutionary left frequently serves as the colourful *toile de fond* to the action of Daeninckx's novels as they unfold in the narrative present. If *Le Der des ders* sensationalises anarchism through its focus on the violence of illegalism, it nevertheless reflects nostalgia for the anarcho-syndicalist and pacifist tradition of

the early twentieth century in which Daeninckx shares through the memory of his paternal grandfather, an anarchist who deserted during the First World War (Hurcombe 2015; Reid 2010, 43).

The purpose of this article is to explore the legacies of libertarianism that permeate and pervade the historical backdrop of three of Daeninckx's novels: *Nazis dans le métro* (1996), *Éthique en toc* (2000) and *La Route du Rom* (2003). It will also consider ways in which these works suggest the persistence and continued pertinence of the libertarian mindset in Daeninckx's fiction, notably through the figure of the detective and the counter-communities in which he operates and which he generates through his inquiries, thereby arriving at an understanding of how the contemporary *noir* might function as an autonomous space of radical political alterity beyond both party and state. Indeed, all three novels belong to a collective enterprise: the multi-authored series of *Le Poulpe* novels published by Éditions Baleine, launched in 1995 by Jean-Bernard Pouy.<sup>3</sup> The series, which enjoys a large readership, follows the work of the private detective Gabriel Lecouivreur, whose tentacular reach has earned him the nickname of the series' title. Daeninckx's contributions were published following his decision to kill off his own investigative creation, the hero of *Meurtres pour mémoire*, Inspector Cadin, in *Le Facteur fatal* (1990), a collection of short stories that culminates in Cadin's suicide on the eve of 1990. As Dominique Jeannerod has observed, Cadin's suicide coincides with the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the supposed triumph of liberalism, offering 'un écho désespéré à l'article discuté de Fukuyama "The End of History" traduit et publié en France à l'automne de 1989' (2007, 33). For Gorrara, then, Cadin's suicide reflects the inability of the *gauchiste* values embodied by the inspector, already sorely tested by the Mitterrand years, to survive beyond the end of the Cold War (2003, 85).

This article will argue that Daeninckx's subsequent decision to contribute to the *Le Poulpe* series reflects a new direction, one that has been overlooked owing to a tendency among critics to consider these three novels only in terms of Daeninckx's admittedly important interest in France's recent history; the detective in such analyses is first and foremost a historian (Jeannerod 2007, 34). However, here I will read these three novels less in terms of their exploration of history and more as an articulation of forms of socio-political interaction 'outside the ontological order of state sovereignty' (Newman 2010a, 3) and which is located in the investigative community that forms around the crime in each novel. It is through this community that injustices, both past and present, can be articulated and new models of engagement proposed to readers. In this, Daeninckx's novels embody popular culture's 'transformative potential ..., caught up [as it is] in a dialectical exchange between the processes of production and activities of consumption that have the power to shape how people think about the world around them' (Gorrara 2012, 11). Moreover, they reflect in the image of the investigative community 'an "anarchist invariant": the recurring desire for life without government that haunts the political imagination' and which Saul Newman terms 'postanarchism' (2010a, 1). The latter reflects what Woodcock considers to be anarchism's protean nature and accounts for 'the fluid survival of the libertarian attitude' beyond the nineteenth century (1986, 18), a phenomenon also observed by Albert Camus even at the height of the French radical left's post-war alignment with the PCF and tied to his concept of the *pensée de midi*, to which we shall return (1957, 345–377). To this end, this article will consider the extent to which a broad libertarian tradition exists, as it does for Newman in his analysis of contemporary radical thinkers, as a 'hidden referent' in the three works, offering models of 'politics beyond the state, political organisation beyond the party, and political subjectivity beyond class' (Newman 2010b, 1).

## The lost world of libertarianism

None of Daeninckx's three *Le Poulpe* novels is concerned ostensibly with libertarianism. *Nazis dans le métro* follows the investigation by Lecouvreur into an assault upon his favourite author of crime fiction, the anarcho-pacifist and former *résistant* André Sloga. The attack, it emerges, is motivated by a personal investigation by Sloga into a new union of the far left and the far right, inspired by the conversion of former Russian and Serbian communists to radical nationalism in a 'stratégie d'alliance rouge et brune' (Daeninckx 1996, 62), formulated in the outer districts of Paris. More importantly, Sloga was about to reveal the role played in this burgeoning alliance by the future *académicien* Jean Brienne. *Éthique en toc* sees Lecouvreur investigating the suicide of his friend and historian, Pierre Floric, who, it transpires, was being blackmailed by an archivist, André Bérault. Bérault, the son of a collaborator, is at the heart of a revisionist plot based in Lyon to infiltrate the French university system and to rewrite the Holocaust, minimising its relevance to the history of the Second World War, using bribery as a means of controlling doctoral juries. *La Route du Rom* is the story of Lecouvreur's investigation into the death of another friend, Jésus, a Romani traveller killed when breaking into a Normandy school that had been requisitioned as a field hospital during the Occupation. Once more, the investigation reveals the intricate connections between France's wartime past and the present; Jésus was conducting his own inquiry into the treatment of his great uncle, Antonio, who was sterilised by the local doctor under Nazi orders when Antonio was working as a slave labourer in the region. *Nazis* and *Éthique* in particular are inspired by a wave of Holocaust denial and a rise in anti-Semitism popularised by French far-right political discourse, but also prevalent in some sections of the French far left and intelligentsia in the 1990s (Hutton 2013, 183–188) while *La Route du Rom* maps contemporary prejudices regarding the Romani population of France onto a longer history of oppression that includes their deportation to Nazi death camps. All three end with the partial victory for the detective, and for memory recuperation, as is so often the case in Daeninckx's fiction: Brienne is exposed at his investiture by Lecouvreur, albeit in slightly comic fashion; Bérault is shot by one of his victims after revealing the extent of revisionist infiltration; and the memory of collaboration is gradually awakened in the fictional town of Corneville in the Cotentin when the Romani community distribute leaflets revealing the former mayor's support for Pétain's National Revolution and Lecouvreur and Antonio's father confront the local doctor who sterilised Antonio. In this way, and as Rubino observes, Daeninckx exploits the *noir's* traditional focus on the socially marginalised in order to foreground the memories of communities excluded from mainstream, national and state-sanctioned memory (2009, 24).

If the Second World War remains a privileged point of reference for Daeninckx, all three novels nevertheless evoke the awareness of a rich and varied past of radical engagement in which libertarianism plays its part, suggesting a long and troubled history of opposition to the forces of state oppression, whether this be the Vichy State or the Republic. Much of *Nazis* is set in and around the 13th arrondissement of Paris, which provides something of a refuge for Lecouvreur from the communist districts to the north where '[l]a banlieue rouge virait au brun' (1996, 71). In *Éthique*, Floric was a historian of radical, working-class politics in Lyon and the surrounding area, but also a specialist on Caserio, the Italian anarchist who assassinated President Sadi Carnot there in 1894, and Cyvoct, a French anarchist responsible for bombing the Place Bellecour (2010, 27). In *La Route du Rom*, however, the only direct connection to be made to libertarianism is almost involuntary; Lecouvreur recalls that André Breton was



born in Tinchebray in Normandy, which in turn triggers the memory of an encounter with the editor of Breton's anarchist review of the 1950s, *Le Libertaire*, and Breton's assertion that 'le surréalisme s'est pour la première fois reconnu dans le miroir noir de l'anarchisme' (cited in Daeninckx 2011b, 131). Space and place in all three works trigger fleeting memories of libertarianism in the mind of the detective.

Yet, if anarchism lives on, it often does so in degraded forms. Lecouvreur perceives the 13th arrondissement's recycling of anarchism as a ploy developed by 'des anars commerçants'; in restaurants on the Butte aux Cailles, 'Des gratteurs de guitare jouaient du Ferré, du Brassens, du Bruant, plus rarement du Montéhus. Surtout pas de subversif contemporain qui risquait de perturber les digestions' (1996, 84). The same gentrification of former anarchist districts is in evidence in Lyon; Floric's wife lives in a well-appointed apartment in 'l'ancien quartier des canuts [où] les ouvriers tisseurs de soie ... avaient inscrit cette fière devise sur leur drapeau noir, un siècle et demi plus tôt, "vivre en travaillant ou mourir en combattant"' (2010, 63). Léa, the student and dancer employed by Béraut to seduce and compromise Floric when he uncovers Béraut's revisionist doctoral thesis, and those like her who once shared a squat in Lyon, are aping anarchism, according to Zill Dagona, a local radical who helps Lecouvreur with his investigation. Their squat was merely a 'merdier'; the shots one of their number (later revealed to be Béraut) fired on police were 'un des épisodes de la légende noire de l'ultra-gauche lyonnaise que les mômes se racontent, dans les rades, en ayant l'impression d'être à la pointe du combat' (95). Indeed, Lyon seems to offer proof of the limits of anarchism; it is a city that has strayed far from its radical past, thus enabling it to become the centre of French revisionism:

Les visages des passants semblaient encore habités par le désespoir de leurs ancêtres qui peuplaient les cristalleries, les usines chimiques, les fabriques de tuiles, les ateliers des chaudronneries, qui dormaient sur la paille souillée des écuries. Sur un mur de la rue Edison, une plaque fêlée rappelait qu'en mai 1897, à cet endroit alors dévolu au cabaret des Folies Gauloises, Louise Michel avait proclamé : 'Le vieux monde doit disparaître, déjà il s'en va. C'est un monde nouveau qui monte à la place d'un monde raccommodé.' [Lecouvreur] se fit la réflexion que le futur n'avait malheureusement pas donné raison au présent généreux qu'elle avait utilisé. (148–149)

Anarchism appears to be experienced nostalgically and through a recognition that the 'luttres d'autrefois sont aujourd'hui inconcevables in a world where class and political distinctions are being blurred; the historically informed detective succeeds only 'par une fidélité de la mémoire [à réparer] symboliquement les pertes' and to recuperate fragmentary memories of radicalism (Rubino 2009, 46, 122).

Yet, the former spaces of libertarianism are nevertheless where new forms of radicalism persist; it is precisely in the former centres of French political radicalism, Paris and Lyon, that what Newman terms a politics of anti-politics beyond the confines of political parties and the state continues to flourish (2010a, 4). If a walk through the streets of either city triggers distant memories of battles Lecouvreur could never have known, it can also spark more recent memories of spontaneous revolt. In *Nazis*, he recalls student protests against the minimum wage, imposed during a period of *cohabitation* and collusion between the democratic left and right, and the help afforded to the students by onlooking prisoners in La Santé gaol who identified police cars lining the street below (Daeninckx 1996, 25). A few years later in Lyon he witnesses similar scenes when students block train lines during a strike and are encouraged by 'les incarcérés de Saint-Paul et Saint-Joseph', described as 'lycéens vieillis, derrière les barreaux' (2010, 43).



Moreover, his enquiries into Sloga reveal the activities of an unrepentant radical. Sloga the anarchist fought in the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War and then in the Resistance during the Occupation. In the 1990s, and in his investigation into the crossing of lines from communism to fascism, 'Il était clair ... que cinquante ans plus tard, il avait repris le maquis (1996, 58). The tradition of anarchist anti-politics persists in *Éthique* in the personage of Dagona, the investigative, independent journalist, who we first see typing up his radical review, *Sapeur sans tablier*, to the now non-ironic accompaniment of Ferré's *Ni Dieu ni maître*. A former employee of the Berliet factory and *soixante-huitard*, Dagona famously rearranged

les lettres de BERLIET dans l'ordre qu'il rêvait pour la vie. Grâce à lui, des semaines durant, on avait lu *LIBERTE* au-dessus des chaînes silencieuses. Trente ans plus tard, c'est de cette adresse au monde qu'on se souvenait dans l'armée défaite des hommes en bleus, et lui ne s'était jamais tout à fait remis de son geste. (Daeninckx 2010, 29)

The libertarian spirit therefore lives on within Paris and Lyon and in the hearts and activities of a handful of characters, but, as we shall now see, it also pervades and drives the inquiry at the heart of the *roman noir*.

### Dissidence and detection

As the series editors state, 'Le Poulpe n'est ni un vengeur, ni un justicier, ni le représentant d'une loi ou d'une morale. Il est un personnage libre, curieux, un témoin en mouvement qui, pour appréhender le monde contemporain, va se rendre compte pour lui-même des désordres du quotidien.'<sup>4</sup> Unlike Daeninckx's earlier creation, Inspector Cadin, Lecouvreur creates and then leads his own unsanctioned investigation. In accordance with the rules of the series, this is prompted by a *fait divers* upon which he stumbles usually over a beer or coffee in his favourite bar-bistro, the *Pied de Porc à la Sainte-Scolasse*. Contributors must draw upon a range of characters including the regulars and staff of the *Pied de Porc*, but also Chéryl (Lecouvreur's partner), Pedro, a Spanish anarchist said to have fought with the Durutti Column<sup>5</sup> and various others who constitute a network of support characters. Lecouvreur thus operates outside state interests, seeking out trouble selectively rather than stumbling across it as Cadin sometimes does. Moreover, whilst other detectives in the *noir* tradition, such as its original model, Raymond Chandler's Phillip Marlowe, are dependent on their clients' wallets, Lecouvreur enjoys an independence of means and motive; his inquiries are never prompted by the personal vendettas or financial interests of others. Indeed, his finances remain a mystery over which Daeninckx draws a veil. His pursuit of knowledge thus benefits from a purity denied the professional inquirers the reader encounters throughout. Police officers, such as Inspector Vergeat in *Nazis*, who despises both Sloga and Lecouvreur for their dissident activities (Daeninckx 1996, 18), are keen to limit any damaging revelations. Journalists are often in hock to their editors and advertisers, professing to defend the truth, like Fred Ledœunf in *Nazis*, failing ultimately to reveal it (52). Historians and archivists are similarly depicted as wary of disturbing the peace and sully local reputations; the intern in Corneville's library in *La Route du Rom* admits to Lecouvreur: 'On m'a posé là pour surveiller, empêcher le chahut, point barre' (2011b, 162) and that he dare not risk his position: 'N'importe comment, je ne veux pas faire de zèle : je suis emploi-jeune et mon contrat se termine dans deux mois...' (162–163). In the worst cases, they turn criminal; in *Éthique*, they falsify evidence, through revisionist activities, and then cover their tracks by burning down the Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire. In each case, though, such professional inquirers are

shown to be in the service of another, be it the state, commercial interests or, in the case of revisionists, ideology.

Nevertheless, the motives behind Lecouvreur's inquiries do not stem directly from any sense of pursuing a moral agenda. Each inquiry is prompted by a personal commitment to a fellow outsider: Sloga, the novelist who cannot find a publisher because of his political activities and disputes with the authorities; Floric, who has been marginalised by his employers following his discovery of Béraut's revisionism; and Jésus, the Romani branded a common thief after he is caught trespassing in the local school. Such loyalties and friendships are the product of Lecouvreur's own dissident background and free spirit. His friendship with Jésus, a musician, results from their having worked together on an independent film in Spain. He met Floric when the two spent a year in a *bataillon disciplinaire* during their military service and following convictions for insubordination. Although he only meets Sloga for the first time following the attack upon him, Lecouvreur is a 'lecteur avisé de romans policiers' and an admirer of 'la vie qui palpite, bien saignante' in Sloga's fiction, and which derives from the writer's own engagement (1996, 24, 12). Lecouvreur is himself a would-be writer of crime fiction (48).

It is the investigation of the attack on Sloga that allows Daeninckx to speculate on the *noir* as a genre and to consider its potential function in a post-ideological world where former communists can join hands with radical nationalists. Sloga hardly features as a character, existing primarily as a pretext to a broader inquiry which draws in readers of *noir* fiction. Lecouvreur is first to recognise Sloga's name and to explain his significance to Gérard, the owner of the *Pied de Porc*, equally a fan of the genre, albeit a less discerning one than Lecouvreur in the latter's eyes, defending attempts by the literary mainstream to experiment with the genre in his appreciation of Alain Robbe-Grillet's '*Mystère et boules de gomme* [sic]...' (1996, 35). Together they read the manuscript of *La Lune au marais*, Sloga's latest work, which Lecouvreur has managed to retrieve in what turns out to be one of the novel's red herrings. Lecouvreur is also assisted in his inquiry by a nurse in the hospital where Sloga is being treated, a fan of his fiction and volunteer hospital librarian. Other characters suggest the ways in which their own activities resemble the work of the detective or the writer or, better still, the crime writer. Gilbert Gache, the alcoholic philosophy lecturer, describes the profession of philosopher as 'un peu un détective de la pensée' (76). Ledœunf also claims that 'Détective privé; mais c'est le rêve de tout journaliste qui se respecte...' (46).<sup>6</sup> Equally, *La Lune au marais* turns out to be a thinly veiled account of real-life murders and local intrigues meticulously investigated by Sloga himself. Indeed, the equation of detective with scrupulous crime writer is made by Vergeat in an encounter with Lecouvreur in the foyer of Sloga's apartment block and in what is intended as an insult, but taken as a compliment by the detective: 'tu pourrais être son fils ! Il flotte la même bouillie dans vos tranches hydrocéphales... Défiance vis-à-vis de l'ordre, haine irraisonnée de l'uniforme, contestation primaire des lois... Des chieurs, voilà ce que vous êtes, des chieurs congénitaux !' (18). Detection and crime writing are therefore imbued, in both the minds of Lecouvreur and the authorities, with the power to subvert and the libertarian spirit of contestation.

Lecouvreur's literary tastes extend beyond the *noir*, however, and his faith in the genre and in literature is not absolute. Indeed, Sloga's and Lecouvreur's inquiries reveal a history of complicity between literature and fascism. When Lecouvreur floors a neo-Nazi bookshop owner who caters to a far-right and a far-left clientele simultaneously, he leaves his crumpled body 'au milieu des sombres couvertures de ses Bonnard, Rebatet, Suarez, Brasillach,

Astopov et de ses Jumel. Avant de sortir Gabriel prit un Charyn et un Vilar qui n'avaient rien à faire en cette compagnie, et laissa les Malet' (1996, 88).<sup>7</sup> In addition to this, in *Éthique* he joins the spontaneous human chain that forms to save the 'livres aux tranches rongées par les flammes' of the burning library and to preserve 'la mémoire atrophiée des passants et penseurs ordinaires de la planète qui, pour leur malheur, avaient fait une halte dans ces lieux' (2010, 50). Literature thus not only has the potential to serve as the storehouse of human memory, but also to form the basis of community in the present; a community forms spontaneously around the injured Sloga just as it does to save the holdings of the Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire. Indeed, the very processes surrounding writing and publishing are collective, as Lecouvreur suggests when passing himself off as a copy editor to a vet in *Nazis*:

Oh ! C'est dans tous les métiers pareil. Par exemple, dans votre domaine, la médecine... Toute une équipe travaille pendant des années sur un virus et quand on découvre le vaccin on ne dit pas que c'est le vaccin de l'équipe du professeur Machin. Il n'y a qu'un nom sur le formulaire de demande d'attribution du prix Nobel. Machin, un point, c'est tout ! (1996, 42)

Literature, and therefore crime fiction, serves in Daeninckx's contributions to the *Le Poulpe* series, as a focal point for the formation of spontaneous human collectives. These contributions also reflect a form of communal engagement on the part of Daeninckx, who now becomes a single member of an authorial team, as Lecouvreur's assertions vis-à-vis the collective nature of publishing suggest.

In each novel, Lecouvreur completes an inquiry initiated by someone with whom he feels a spiritual, but also political affinity: in *Nazis*, Lecouvreur becomes the public voice of the now amnesiac Sloga to reveal the mystery of the murders in Poitou-Charentes that form the basis of *La Lune au marais* and Brienne's neo-Nazi connections. In *Éthique*, he exposes Béraut's revisionist activities, first detected by Floric, and, in so doing, prompts the resignation of a number of revisionist historians across the country who have benefitted from his protection. In *La Route du Rom*, his inquiries reveal that Jésus himself was acting as a detective, seeking out the traces, literally inscribed in the form of an accusation carved into the walls of the school cellars, of Antonio's torture.

Yet, Lecouvreur is not the exceptional man of science of late nineteenth-century detective fiction and there is no outmoded celebration of genius to be read into these works. Nor, should we add, is he the isolated, psychologically damaged or vaguely dysfunctional detective of much contemporary European crime writing who might be considered 'defective inspectors', to borrow Simon Kemp's expression (2006). In each novel, Lecouvreur generates an investigative community around himself; a range of secondary and minor characters who again share the values of the victim and of Lecouvreur and who contribute to the resolution of the crime or the mystery. Built around the inquiry and the figure of the detective, these communities frequently also serve to contest a range of forms of authority either through the explicit formulation of a critique of power or through the very difference of their existence. Indeed, it is these characters who often help to discern the contemporary ramifications of events in the past for an understanding of the status quo; radicalism is shared between the novels' characters rather than located in a single hero or vision.

In *Éthique*, for example, Dagona disabuses Lecouvreur of any hope that historians, or indeed all professional inquirers, 'les juges, les avocats, les commissaires de police, les sociologues, ... aient l'échine moins souple que les pisseurs de copie', since all operate within the same social circles. As state employees, academic historians are 'attachés à la laisse de l'institution, et ils font là où on leur dit de faire !' (2010, 124). For Dagona, the lacunae of

history are only ever deliberate omissions (125–126). In *Nazis*, Lecouvreur's team of investigators and readers contribute to a highly critical appraisal of the state of the revolutionary left in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Gache identifies 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall as 'l'année de tous les dangers' after which '[l]a Révolution était à l'image de la momie de Lénine qui pourrit inéluctablement dans son mausolée-sarcophage' (1996, 74). The alliance of communists and fascists, both he and Pedro point out to Lecouvreur and the reader, is, however, not an act of despair, but a point of continuity; Pedro thus reminds Lecouvreur of the Party's history of betraying unsanctioned, spontaneous and, in his anarchist view, legitimate revolts against oppressive centralised control: the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion and of the *Makhnovshchina* during the Russian Civil War, and of Catalan anarcho-sindicalists during the Spanish Civil War (61). Indeed, the excesses of Stalinism are often set alongside those of 'tous les "ismes" de l'histoire' (2010, 99–100). Communism in *Nazis* is envisaged and discussed very much in anarchist terms; the Communist Party is 'a centralised and disciplined organisation structured around the aim of seizing state power' and which does not tolerate dissidence or difference. In seeking to usurp the power of state, it adopts 'a certain relationship of domination' to which its members are bound by the Party's own organisational principles (Newman 2010b, 2). The investigative community that forms at the heart of all three novels is, by way of contrast, unstructured and marked by the free association of independently minded individuals. It thereby evokes the protean formlessness of 'the libertarian attitude—its rejection of dogma, its deliberate avoidance of rigidly systematic theory, and, above all, its stress on extreme freedom of choice and on the primacy of individual judgement—[that] creates immediately the possibility of a variety of points of view' (Woodcock 1986, 17). It is upon this 'multiplicité de points de vue sur un fait divers' (Daeninckx 2011b, 120) that Lecouvreur is able to arrive at a more complex understanding of both the past and the present than that provided by adherence to officially authored versions of events, whether these be sanctioned by state or party.

### Crime fiction and community

In many ways, the Romani community of *La Route du Rom* epitomises the value placed in community per se by Daeninckx throughout the three novels. Although less explicitly concerned with ideology and the exercise of power than either *Nazis* or *Éthique*, *La Route du Rom* foregrounds the communitarian principles that underpin the investigative processes of the two earlier novels. Throughout, Daeninckx references Romani musical heritage and the novel echoes to the libertarian refrain of one particular song:

Je suis de nulle part

Je n'ai pas de pays

Je n'ai pas de patrie

Je suis née de l'amour... (2011b, 4)

For Daeninckx, the Romani represent the possibility of living communally beyond the confines imposed by state or party upon identity. It is, as Incarna, Antonio's former lover, suggests, a collective, autonomous enterprise; she thus remarks upon the absurdity of the continued persecution of the Roma people across the European Union: 'Nous n'avons jamais voulu voir les frontières que les différents peuples avaient dressées sur notre route. Je me

disais que, maintenant qu'elles s'effacent, les habitants de tous ces pays reconnaîtraient que nous n'avions pas totalement tort...'(145). In so doing, she evokes, albeit indirectly, the impossibility of a genuinely inclusive, transnational project founded upon the existence of nation states and posits the community as 'a space of autonomy which takes its distance from the state, and thus calls into question, the very principle of state sovereignty' (Newman 2010a, 11). For Newman, this positioning of autonomous communities beyond the state performs an othering function, which he considers ethical:

Ethics ... involves the opening up of existing political identities, practices, institutions and discourses to an Other which is beyond their terms. Ethics is more than the application of moral and rational norms—it is rather the continual disturbance of the sovereignty of these norms, and the identities and institutions which draw their legitimacy from them, in the name of something that exceeds their grasp. Importantly, then, ethics is what disturbs politics from the outside. (Newman 2010a, 7)

The community serves in Daeninckx's crime fiction as a counterpoint through which the presuppositions, prejudices and contemporary mores of French society, their rootedness in the past and their persistence in the present, can be challenged. It is therefore much more than a mere repository of occluded memories of recent French history into which the detective-historian delves to right a past wrong. And yet, it is this function which appears to interest scholars of Daeninckx and much contemporary French crime fiction almost exclusively. Jeannerod, for example, reads Daeninckx's fiction within the context of developments in French historiography since the 1980s rather than in terms of the broader ethical and socio-political implications of the historical turn in French crime fiction since that decade (2007, 34–35). The death of Cadin and the decision to contribute to the *Le Poulpe* series nevertheless represent a re-orientation on the part of Daeninckx and a far more direct engagement with the polemics of his day, but also with new forms of political radicalism that emerge in the post-ideological landscape of late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Although it is true that, as Gorrara writes, 'memories of the Second World War ... have retained their power to shape current political identities, alignments and antagonisms' (2012, 8), the cultural historical approach to recent French crime novels has often tended to downplay their relevance to contemporary radical politics, locking them 'in the circle of memory' in a national culture that is allegedly 'still awaiting its final liberation from the Occupation' (Morris 2015, 266), trapped in 'un passé qui ne passe pas', as Conan and Rouso (1994) have written of the memory of those years. The study of the investigative community in Daeninckx's novels begins to break that circle, to see beyond their relevance to France's ongoing memory wars but also to reveal their pertinence within a broader landscape of contemporary political radicalism which suggests the persistence of a libertarian mindset.

Newman's contemporary spaces of autonomy, amidst which we can place the dissident communities frequented by Lecouvreur in Paris or the Romani of *La Route du Rom*, belong to a libertarian strain of thought that, despite moments of pessimism, has not been entirely eradicated. They reflect the persistence of a tradition which, as Woodcock suggested even before the collapse of the Soviet bloc, is more deeply entrenched than has been acknowledged (1986, 270–272). Yet they also belong specifically to a post-anarchist climate of dissent that has grown out of the twin disillusionment with the liberal state and the Marxist Communist Party, rejecting the former's enslavement to market principles and emphasis on security over freedom.<sup>8</sup> Daeninckx's investigative communities also reflect a libertarian communitarianism that, as Albert Camus had suggested in *L'Homme révolté*, possesses its

own neglected history. The syndicalist community, as Camus terms it, rooted in the commune and the ties and interests shared by its members, offers a concrete social base in opposition to the abstraction of ideology, summed up in the opposition of *la pensée de midi* to *la pensée allemande*; that is, the opposition of an 'esprit méditerranéen' that has given the world 'la pensée libertaire des Français, des Espagnols et des Italiens' (Camus 1957, 369) to communism and fascism. 'La commune contre l'état, la société concrète contre la société absolutiste, la liberté réfléchie contre la tyrannie rationnelle, l'individualisme altruiste enfin contre la colonisation des masses' (369) could just as well be the mantra of Lecouvreur and the investigative community, and indeed Daeninckx himself, as much as it is the credo of Camusian communitarianism. Both Newman's contemporary post-anarchist communities ('indigenous groups, anti-capitalist networks, environmental activists, anti-war movements') and the Camusian community are 'movements of resistance [and] ultimately struggles for autonomy' (Newman 2010a, 14) that simultaneously draw upon a rich heritage of libertarianism and offer more authentic models of living for contemporary humanity as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

And, perhaps like Camus, Daeninckx can be accused of sometimes sacrificing complexity and ambiguity for the sake of exemplarity and the preservation of a *belle âme* unsullied by compromise.<sup>10</sup> Some see in his works a facile battle between good and evil that would undermine any claims to an affinity with a philosophy in which, above all, the autonomy of the individual and his or her 'responsibility for decision making' is celebrated (Woodcock 1986, 30).<sup>11</sup> Margaret-Anne Hutton thus acknowledges a Manicheism in Daeninckx's treatment of Holocaust deniers and anti-Semites, describing *Nazis* as a *roman à clé* (2013, 188). She nevertheless concludes that the choice to make criminals of them 'makes both aesthetic and ethical sense' for crime fiction: to engage intellectually with their arguments would be to grant credence, albeit temporarily, to ideas that do not merit serious discussion as to their actual veracity (195). The reader of *Nazis* and *Éthique* is not encouraged to do so and is guided instead by Lecouvreur's righteous revulsion at the evidence of fascism's survival (184). Daeninckx's novels, presume at least a sympathetic, if not an acquiescent, readership.<sup>12</sup> This readership is one that has been brought up in the traditions of a genre which, in France and thanks to the influence of both the *noir* and the *néo-polar*, has become associated with the contestation of all forms of authority. The appeal of crime fiction for its reader lies, as David Platten argues, in the ways in which it 'stirs the blood and triggers the neurons, activating both the senses and the mind' through the revulsion stimulated by the crime and the investigative game into which the reader is drawn (2011, 18–19). The reader, then, is embroiled in the investigative process and accompanies the investigator throughout, anticipating the outcome to the work of the investigator and, in these novels, the investigative community. Even if the reader is new to the series and does not share in the values embodied by Lecouvreur, and vaunted by the publishers on the back of every novel, the presence of this community serves to test and to other the values, ideas and prejudices of the reader through its marginality.

The popularity of Daeninckx's novels, the *Le Poulpe* series more generally and of contemporary French crime fiction, however, suggests not only receptiveness to this contestatory tradition but also a broader sensibility to libertarian principles that underlie many of these works and aspects of contemporary left-wing radicalism. In this, French crime fiction, and Daeninckx's in particular, often reflects a trend observed by Levitas in her discussion of the future of utopian thought: the displacement of radical politics from the revolutionary organisation to counter-cultural movements (1990, 196). For these, radical change is no longer



imminent, as it was for the anarcho-syndicalists of the early twentieth century (Mannheim 1979, 196). Rather, such movements serve to criticise the status quo, relativising it through alternative models of social organisation, seeking to educate in others a desire for change 'without [producing] any necessary move forward into action' (Levitas 1990, 196–197). Echoes of the same thinking are to be found in Newman's post-anarchist communities; both Levitas and Newman point to the persistence of alternative imaginings of social organisation beyond the apparent triumph of liberalism and the collapse of Marxist communism. Daeninckx's decision to contribute to *Le Poulpe's* collective enterprise does not signal a transfer of allegiances from one form of left-wing radicalism to another, from his maternal connections to the PCF to his paternal affiliations with anarcho-syndicalism. Rather, it points to an undercurrent of libertarian thinking that persists within the radical left in France and which frequently finds expression in the contemporary *noir*.

## Notes

1. In a later essay, Lee sees such nihilism as a reflection of the frustration of the 'anarchist-Marxist sentiments' expressed in the May 1968 protests (2009, 76).
2. In *Meurtres pour mémoire*, for example, Veillut, the former Vichy civil servant and Parisian police chief, is shot by the security officer (Pierre Cazes) whom he had deceived into killing a historian of France's part in the Holocaust, Roger Thiraud. The affair is silenced by a judge who rules that Cazes, who is dying of cancer, is too ill to stand trial.
3. For a full list of titles in the series, see <http://www.editionsbaleine.fr/7-le-poulpe> (accessed April 17, 2015).
4. <http://www.editionsbaleine.fr/content/6-presentation-poulpe> (accessed April 21, 2015).
5. Daeninckx in fact reveals his participation in the Spanish Civil War to be a fiction, Pedro only having been five years old when the military rebellion took place (2011b, 51), most likely so as to retain him as a character for subsequent contributions to the series.
6. In *Éthique*, the ambulance driver who lends Lecouvreur and Dagona his services as chauffeur is 'Passionné de romans noirs, il n'en revenait pas de se trouver embarqué dans une des histoires qu'il avait seulement l'habitude de lire' (2010, 163).
7. Astropov is a fictional former Russian dissident who has joined the Bosnian Serb army and whose release from the USSR Lecouvreur once supported. He is based on Edward Limonov, according to Hutton, while Pierre Jumel appears to be a fictionalised version of Patrick Besson (Hutton 2013, 183). Léo Mallet's creation Nestor Burma, like Mallet himself, was an anarchist who abandoned the cause.
8. Liberalism is inadequate to the libertarian as 'Liberalism's paeon to individual freedom is contradicted by its acceptance of the state as the guardian of its freedom' (Newman 2010a, 11).
9. At the heart of the Camusian community lies the universal and universalising principle 'Je me révolte, donc nous sommes'. This, for David Sherman, reveals Camus to be 'guided by the enlightenment ideal of the free, self-determining individual, [attempting] to strike a balance between the ambitions of the individual and the community that is the condition of its [the principle of 'Je me révolte, donc nous sommes'] possibility' (2009, 169).
10. For a discussion of the debate occasioned by Camus' pursuit of a form of engagement that avoided what he considered to be the excesses of revolutionary violence, see Sherman (2009, 173–193).
11. Besson, a frequent target of Daeninckx, satirises precisely this aspect of Daeninckx's writing in his novel *Didier dénonce* ([1997] 2003).
12. Hutton notes that Lecouvreur carries 'considerable moral weight' with the series' readers and suggests that this is partly why he chooses it as a means for exploring contemporary Holocaust denial in *Nazis* (2013, 184).



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